

PROSPECT: OR, VIEW OF THE MORAL WORLD.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 19, 1805.

NO. 3.

COMMENTS UPON THE SACRED WRITINGS OF THE JEWS AND CHRISTIANS.

BOOK OF LEVITICUS.

ONE of the most astonishing facts with which we are presented in the moral world, is that invincible attachment, which man has bestowed upon corrupt systems of theology! A knowledge of individuals, and the history of nations, both combine to demonstrate the truth of this position, and to depict, in the strongest point of light, the lamentable consequences of such human imbecility. In proportion as the doctrines of theology exhibit striking departures from the moral principles of nature—in the same proportion they have been defended with a zeal and ardour, with an inflexibility of character which would have done honour to a more dignified and exalted cause. Carnage and slaughter became incitements to new aggressions in the murder of man, and the depopulation of countries by fire and sword. The bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament, and the homicidal sacrifice of Jesus, in the New, were but the terrors of crusading carnage, and the malignant slaughter of the human species. Examples, especially when sanctioned by Jehovah, become powerfully influential in the regulation of the temperaments and the actions of men; the Old Testament presents a fruitful source of disgraceful evidence upon this point, and is every where calling man to contemplate scenes of injustice and murder organized under the inspection of God himself. The Priests, the *sacerdants* of such bloody religions, have always been interested in keeping up the deception, and concealing from popular view the immoral nature and tendency of the mysterious doctrines which they advanced. Bloody sacrifices dishonourable to an uncultivated savage, and idle ceremonies disgraceful to a child, have formed, in a pre-eminent degree, the basis of all the religions of antiquity. The Jewish religion is a remarkable specimen and proof of this assertion, as may be seen by the slightest recurrence to this sacerdotal book of Leviticus. Here the priestly impositions are displayed with unblushing audacity, and bulls, rams, goats, he-goats, and lambs, with all the feathered tribe, are here offered up, without mercy, under the detestable pretext of destroying the moral turpitude of the human heart! Ye priests and fanatics of all countries, reason demands of you an unequivocal answer to this plain question, Is there any connection between the shedding of blood, and the cure of moral evil? It is immaterial, in the present case, whether it be the blood of a man or the blood of a beast; they are equally destitute of the power of producing the desired effect. The brutal servility exhibited on the part of the close adherents to this doctrine, and the still more degraded condition of that ferocious Deity whose protection is supposed to be granted in the present case, are strong evidences against the divine origin of any religion founded in blood.

How erroneous, how contemptible must be the opinion of that man, who presumes upon appeasing the wrath of his God by bloody sacrifices, by idle ceremonies, by acts of cruelty and injustice ! The crimsoned spectacles of detestable brutality of blood, and bestial carnage so often presented before the Jewish people, destroyed all their moral sympathy, and prepared them for the savage murder of surrounding nations. The idea was riveted in their minds that they should best please Jehovah by an indiscriminate murder of every thing that came in their way ; they slaughtered nations, they depopulated countries, they left not a soul alive to breathe ; and all this for the honour and glory of their national divinity ! Sovereign Arbiter of the universe, what sort of a god did the Jews adore ! Posterity knows, for his moral or rather immoral portraiture has been transmitted to our times, and he stands decorated with all the brutal glory of a bloody and detestable monster ! In proof of which he commands all the bloody sacrifices in this Book of Leviticus, and leads on his chosen people to the unrelenting massacre of their inoffensive neighbours.

The general remarks which we have already made, will apply to several of the first chapters in this Book. In these chapters there is nothing moral, scientific, good, or useful. They consist of a compound of blood and folly, which can neither make the heart better, nor furnish the mind with any wholesome instruction. Writings like these are a burlesque upon principle, and a disgrace to true theism. The author, whoever he might have been, had no knowledge of the moral powers of man, and in the adoration of his God we recognize the barbarism of antiquity, and the incorrect ideas which all savage nations cherish concerning the supreme power of the universe. The great spirit which lives beyond the western hills, and which is adored by the aborigines of America, is much better than the Jewish God ; yet this Indian divinity dwindles into nothing, when compared with that exalted and universal principle of energy, which reason and philosophy have demonstrated to be the true God, and to whom alone the adoration of mortals ought to be paid.

In our next comment, we shall proceed to notice some particular passages which ought, in justice, to be stripped of all moral and scientific character, and consigned to the odium of enlightened posterity.

It must be allowed, that in order to carry men's attention beyond the present course of things, or lead them into any inference concerning invisible intelligent power, they must be actuated by some passion, which prompts their thought and reflection ; some motive, which urges their first inquiry. But what passion shall we here have recourse to, for explaining an effect of such mighty consequence ? Not speculative curiosity surely, or the pure love of truth. That motive is too refined for men in ignorant ages and barbarous nations, and would lead men into inquiries concerning the frame of nature ; a subject too large and comprehensive for their gross apprehensions. No passions, therefore, can be supposed to work upon such barbarians, but the ordinary affections of human life ; the anxious concern for happiness, the dread of future misery, the terror of death, the thirst of revenge, the appetite for food and other necessaries. Agitated by hopes and fears

of this nature, especially the latter, men scrutinize, with a trembling curiosity, the course of future causes, and examine the various and contrary events of human life. And in this disordered scene, with eyes still more disordered and astonished, they see the first obscure traces of Divinity. We are placed in this world, as in a great theatre, where the true springs and causes of every event are entirely unknown to us; nor have we either sufficient wisdom to foresee, or power to prevent, those ills with which we are continually threatened. We hang in perpetual suspense between life and death, health and sickness, plenty and want; which are distributed amongst the human species by secret and unknown causes, whose operation is often unexpected, and always unaccountable. These *unknown causes*, then, become the constant object of our hope and fear; and while the passions are kept in perpetual alarm by anxious expectation of the events, the imagination is equally employed in forming ideas of those powers on which we have so entire a dependence. In proportion as any man's course of life is governed by accident, we always find that he increases in superstition; as may particularly be observed of gamesters and sailors, who, though of all mankind, the least capable of serious consideration, abound most in frivolous and superstitious apprehensions. The gods, says *Coriolanus* in *Dionysius*, have an influence in every affair; but above all in war, where the event is so uncertain. All human life, especially before the institution of order and good government, being subject to fortuitous accidents, it is natural that superstition should prevail every where in barbarous ages, and put men on the most earnest inquiry concerning those invisible powers who dispose of their happiness and misery. Any of the human affections may lead us into the notion of invisible, intelligent power; hope as well as fear, gratitude as well as affliction: but if we examine our own hearts, or observe what passes around us, we shall find, that men are much oftener thrown on their knees by the melancholy than the agreeable passions. Prosperity is easily received as our due; and few questions are asked concerning its cause or author. It begets cheerfulness, and activity, and alacrity, and a lively enjoyment of every social and sensual pleasure: and during this state of mind, men have little leisure or inclination to think of the unknown, invisible regions. On the other hand, every disastrous accident alarms us, and sets us on inquiries concerning the principles whence it arose: apprehensions spring up with regard to futurity; and the mind, sunk in diffidence, terror, and melancholy, has recourse to every method of appeasing those sacred, intelligent powers, on whom our fortune is supposed entirely to depend. Even at this day, and in Europe, ask any of the vulgar, Why he believes in an Omnipotent Creator of the world? he will never mention the beauty of final causes, of which he is ignorant: he will not hold out his hand, and bid you contemplate the suppleness and variety of joints in his fingers, their bending all one way, the counterpoise which they receive from the thumb, the softness and fleshy parts of the inside of his hand, with all the other circumstances which render that member fit for the use for which it was destined. To these he has been long accustomed; and he beholds them with listlessness and unconcern. He will tell you of the sudden and unexpected death of such a one; the fall and bruise of such another; the excessive drought of this season;

the cold and rains of another. These he ascribes to the immediate operation of Providence : and such events, as with good reasoners are the chief difficulties in admitting a Supreme Intelligence, are with him the sole arguments for it.—Convulsions in nature, disorders, prodigies, miracles, though the most opposite to the plan of a wise superintendant, impress mankind with the strongest sentiments of religion : the causes of events seeming then the most unknown and unaccountable. We may conclude, therefore, upon the whole, that since the vulgar, in nations which have embraced the doctrine of Theism, still build it upon irrational and superstitious opinions, they are never led into that opinion by any process of argument, but by a certain train of thinking more suitable to their genius and capacity.

HUME.

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION,

Its progress and establishment in the Roman Empire.

RELIGION in man is the effect of a sense of his misfortunes, and of the fear of invisible powers.

Most legislators have availed themselves of these motives to govern the people, and still more to enslave them. Some of them have asserted, that they held the right of commanding from heaven itself ; and it is thus that theocracy has been established.

If the religion of the Jews has had a more sublime origin, it has not always been exempt from those inconveniences which necessarily arise from the ambition of priests in a theocratic form of government.

Christianity succeeded the Jewish institution. The subjection that Rome, mistress of the world, was under to the most savage tyrants ; the dreadful miseries which the luxury of a court and the maintenance of armies had occasioned throughout this vast empire under the reign of the Neros ; the successive irruptions of the barbarians, who dismembered this great body ; the loss of provinces either by revolt or invasion ; all these natural evils had already prepared the minds of men for a new religion ; and the changes in politics must probably have induced an innovation in the form of worship. In Paganism, which had existed for so many ages, there remained only the fables to which it owes its origin, the folly or the vices of its gods, the avarice of its priests, and the infamy and licentious conduct of the kings who supported them. Then the people, despairing to obtain relief from their tyrants upon earth, had recourse to heaven for protection.

Christianity appeared, and afforded them comfort, at the same time that it taught them to suffer with patience. While the tyranny and licentiousness of princes tended to the destruction of Paganism as well as to that of the empire, the subjects who had been oppressed and spoiled, and who had embraced the new doctrines, were completing its ruin by the examples they gave of those virtues which always accompany the zeal of new-made proselytes. But a religion that arose in the midst of public calamity, must necessarily give its preachers a considerable influence over the unhappy persons who took refuge in it. Thus the power of the clergy commenced, as it were, with the gospel.

From the remains of Pagan superstitions and philosophic sects, a code of rights and tenets was formed, which the simplicity of the pri-

mitive Christians sanctified with real and affecting piety ; but which at the same time left the seed of debates and controversies, from whence arose a variety of passions, disguised and dignified under the name of zeal. These dissensions produced schools, doctors, a tribunal, and a hierarchy. Christianity had begun to be preached by a set of fishermen, destitute of every knowledge but that of the gospel ; it was entirely established by bishops, who formed the church. After this it gained ground by degrees, till at length it attracted the notice of the emperors. Some of these tolerated Christianity either from motives of contempt, or humanity ; others persecuted it : persecution hastened its progress, for which toleration had paved the way. Connivance and proscription, clemency and rigour, were all equally advantageous to it. The sense of freedom so natural to the human mind, induced many persons to embrace it in its infancy, as it has made others reject it since it has been established. This spirit of independency, rather adapted to truth than to novelty, would necessarily have induced a multitude of persons of all ranks to become converts to Christianity, if even the characters it bore had not been calculated to inspire veneration and respect.

RAYNAL.

Paris, October 23.

FANATICS or impostors are wandering in different parts of France, preaching the end of the world, predicting misfortunes, and printing and distributing prophecies, containing the most absurd and terrible tales, which agitate or terrify the lower classes of the people, who, from ignorance, are ready to catch at any thing surprising or miraculous. These itinerant prophets are particularly busy in Belgium, in Flanders, in the cidevant German Provinces on this side of the Rhine, and in the Western department, where the inhabitants are less enlightened, and more superstitious, than in other parts of France. It is said, that the incorrigible adherents to the desperate cause of the Bourbons, employ and pay with British guineas these men, at present devout Christians, but, in fact, scandalous and criminal hypocrites ; many of whom, ten years ago, were the most intolerant atheists and cruel persecutors of the believers in the Christian religion. The prefect of the department of Lys has caused three of these false prophets to be taken up, who, upon examination, were found to have been members of revolutionary committees, in the reign of terror, though now loaded with scapularies, relicks, prayer-books, legends of saints already departed, and prophecies of persons living a life of sanctity, conversing regularly with the Divinity, as well as with the Virgin Mary, and all other inhabitants of heaven. So great was their popularity, and so numerous their adherents, that the gens d'armes who arrested them, were twice repulsed ; and, after they were carried into the prisons of Ghent, by their hypocritical cant they seduced the gaoler, his wife, and two children, to open the doors of their prison, and to escape with them. The police is now in search of them and will probably soon discover them. They left behind them in the gaol a bundle (*pacotille*) of prophecies, in the Flemish and French languages, which they had received since their imprisonment, as all their former papers are deposited at the police office.

In one of these pretended prophecies is foretold, that the next winter will be the coldest experienced in France since 1709 ; that a general famine will desolate all the continent ; and that, before the next spring, all the department between the Rhine and the Loire will be swallowed up by an earthquake ; whilst a plague will destroy 99,108th parts of the people between the Loire, the Alps, and the Pyrenees. From this short specimen, it is easily seen that these terrible predictions are the offspring of the fertile brains of British heretics, or of agents in British pay.—*Journal de la Lys.*

It has been contended by many, that Europe, when ignorant and barbarous, was more populous than at present. The answer to their numerous citations, is, That ten acres of wheat will nourish more men than a hundred acres of heath, pasturage, &c. that Europe was formerly covered with vast forests, and that the Germans lived on the produce of their cattle. This Cæsar and Tacitus affirms ; and their testimony decides the question. A nation of herdsmen cannot be numerous. Civilized Europe is, therefore, necessarily more populous than it was when barbarous and savage. It is a folly to have recourse to historians concerning this matter, who are often untrue or ill informed, when we have before us evident proofs of their falsehood. A country cannot support a great number of people without agriculture, unless it be by a miracle ; and miracles are much more rare than falsehoods.

HELVETIUS.

If we take a survey of that variety of sects which are scattered over the face of the earth, and who mutually accuse each other of falsehood and error, and ask which is the right ; every one of them in their turns will answer *theirs* ; we know our sect is in the right, because God hath declared so. "All of them," says Charron, "pretend that they derive their doctrine, not from men, nor from any created being, but from God. But to say truth, without flattery or disguise, there is nothing in such pretensions : however they may talk, they owe their religion to human means ; witness the manner in which they first adopt it. The nation, country, and place where they are born and bred, determine it. Are we not circumcised or baptized, made Jews, Turks, or Christians, before we are men ?" Our religion is not the effect of choice, but of accident ; and to impute it to us, is unjust : it is to reward or punish us for being born in this or that country. If the method taken by him who is in the right, and by him who is in the wrong, be the same ; what merit or demerit hath the one more than the other ? Now, either all religions are good, and agreeable to God ; or if there be one which he hath dictated to man, and will punish him for rejecting, he hath certainly distinguished it by manifest signs and tokens, as the only true one. These are common to all times and places, and are equally obvious to all mankind. If natural religion be insufficient, it is owing to the obscurity in which it necessarily leaves those sublime truths it professes to teach. It is the business of revelation to exhibit them to the mind in a more clear and sensible manner, to adapt them to the understandings of men, in order that they may be capable of be-

lieving them. True faith is assured and confirmed by the understanding; and the best of all religions is undoubtedly the clearest. If there be only one religion in the world which can prevent our suffering eternal damnation, and ensure our title to future happiness; and there be on any part of the earth a single mortal who is sincere, and is not convinced of its evidence; the God of that religion must be a cruel tyrant. Would we seek the truth, therefore, in sincerity, we must lay no stress on the place and circumstances of our birth, nor on the authority of fathers or teachers; but appeal to the dictates of reason and conscience concerning every thing taught us in our youth. It is to no purpose to bid me subject my reason to the truth of things of which it is incapacitated to judge; the man who would impose on me a falsehood, may bid me do the same. It is necessary, therefore, I should employ my reason even to know when I ought to submit. ROUSSEAU.

Is it not very natural, that all the various metamorphoses with which the earth may be said to be covered, should have led the orientals, whose imagination is so luxuriant, to imagine that our souls passed from one body to another? An almost imperceptible point grows to be a worm, and this worm becomes a butterfly; an acorn changes to an oak, an egg to a bird; water becomes clouds and thunder; wood is turned into fire and ashes: in a word, all nature is more or less metamorphosis. Souls being accounted tenous forms, were soon concluded to partake of that property, which was sensibly seen in more dense and heavy bodies. The metempsychosis is, perhaps, the most ancient doctrine in the known world, and still prevails in a great part of India and China.

It is likewise very natural that those ancient fables collected and embellished by Ovid in his admirable work, took rise from the several metamorphoses with which our eyes are conversant. The very Jews have not been without their metamorphoses. If Niobe was changed into marble, Heth, Lot's wife, was turned into salt. As Eurydice was detained in hell for looking back, a like indiscretion cost Lot's wife her human nature. The country town in Phrygia, where lived the hospitable Baucis and Philemon, is changed into a lake; the same submersion has befallen Sodom. Arius's daughters turned water into oil; the scripture mentions a change something similar, but more sacred and real. Cadmus was turned into a serpent, and the like was seen in Aaron's rod.

The Pagan deities very often assumed a human disguise; and when angels appeared to the Jews, it was always as men; with Abraham they partook of a repast. St. Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians, says, that the messenger of Satan cuffed him.

It is said that the Jews in England are making serious attempts to avail themselves of the full extent of that toleration afforded by the British constitution, by endeavouring, in the first instance, to emerge from the obscurity in which they have always been kept by the illiterate, and to attempt the promulgation of their religious tenets. The heads of the Synagogues in London, Bath, Bristol, &c. as well as several opulent individuals of that sect, have lately had meetings to effect this purpose. They express their will to be, that a proper rank may be allotted to them amongst the different sectaries of the kingdom.

Those who have read the Athanasian Creed, will immediately see the application of the following :

Whoever will be married, before all things it is necessary that he hold the conjugal faith.

Which faith, except every one keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall be scolded at everlastingly.

And the conjugal faith is this, that there were two rational beings created, both equal, yet one superior to the other.

The inferior shall bear rule over the superior.

The man is superior to the woman, and the woman inferior to the man.

Yet both are equal, and the woman shall govern the man.

The woman is commanded to obey the man, and the man ought to obey the woman.

And yet there are not two obedients, but one obedient.

For there is one dominion nominal of the husband, and another dominion real of the wife.

And yet there are not two dominions, but one dominion.

Moreover we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge, that wives must submit themselves to their husbands, and be subject in all things.

So we are forbidden by the conjugal faith to say, they shall be at all influenced by their wills, or pay any regard to their commands.

The man was not created for the woman, but the woman for the man.

And yet the man shall be the slave of the woman, and the woman the tyrant of the man.

So that, as aforesaid, the subjection of the superior to the inferior is to be believed.

He, therefore, that would marry, must thus think of the woman and of the man.

Furthermore, it is necessary to submissive matrimony, that he also believe the infallibility of the wife.

For the right faith is this, that the wife is fallible and infallible.

Perfectly fallible and perfectly infallible, of an erring soul and an unerring mind subsisting.

Fallible as touching her human nature, and infallible as touching her female sex.

Who, although she be fallible and infallible, yet is she not two, but one woman.

Who submitted to lawful matrimony to acquire unlawful dominion, and promised religiously to obey, that she might rule in injustice and folly.

This is the conjugal faith, which, except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be married.

Tyranny to the wife, slavery to the husband, and ruin to the family.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, to the end of the world.

Amen.

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